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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1319
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 8170
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002295

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STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2017

TAGS: PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: HOUSE SHENANIGANS CONTINUE

REF: A. ABUJA 2200

¶B. ABUJA 2096

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Lisa Piascik for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. SUMMARY: Speaker of the House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh (Peoples Democratic Party, PDP - Osun State) continues her battle to remain in control of the House, despite the ongoing scandal over contract awards for the renovation of her and her deputy's official residences. Etteh is accused by those calling for her removal of sabotaging meetings and simply ignoring the Idoko Panel investigative report into the allegations (Ref B). Etteh agreed on October 25 to step aside, but only if she can personally chose the person who will preside over the Idoko report. Those who oppose Etteh, both from within the majority PDP and without, contend that her selection of the person to preside over discussion of the Idoko report is no better than her continuing to preside. President Yar'Adua called a surprise meeting with the leadership of both the House and the Senate on October 26. While he continues publicly to refuse to interfere in the chaos in the House, citing separation of powers concerns, he is widely reported to have urged the leadership to resolve the situation quickly. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Despite initial press reports that Etteh agreed to step aside for the House discussions of the Idoko panel report, it was later learned that she conditioned any agreement to do this to her being able to select an interim Chairman to preside over the discussions in the House. Those who oppose Etteh (a substantial group drawn both from within the PDP and opposition parties) are calling instead for the election of a Speaker Pro Tempore to preside. Congressman Ternu Tsegba (PDP - Benue State) (protect) told PolOff that if the Speaker does not step aside unconditionally when the House reconvenes October 30, opposition members will not let her preside at all - which could lead to another day of deadlock. Tsegba also told PolOff that, in a further attempt to make the issue disappear, he believes Etteh may not include the investigation on the schedule when the House reconvenes. However, Tsegba said he and his colleagues are working on a petition to have Etteh impeached, and he believes they will soon have enough signatures to succeed. Tsegba said they currently have 212 of the 240 signatures

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needed to force the speaker out.

¶13. (C) To add to the ongoing frustration and confusion in the House, when anti-Etteh congress members from both the PDP and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) attempted to hold caucus meetings on October 24, they arrived to find all the hearing rooms locked. The Sergeant-At-Arms informed them that they needed to apply for use of the rooms, which was news to even senior members of the House. The members believe this was a deliberate attempt by Etteh's supporters to stop them from strategizing against the Speaker.

¶14. (C) President Umaru Yar'Adua summoned the leadership of both the House of Representatives and Senate to a meeting on Friday, October 26, generating speculation that Yar'Adua was finally going to step in to end the crisis. While the President reportedly encouraged the leaders to find a resolution, he continues to stand by statements not to interfere with the operation of the legislative branch; no statement was issued after the meeting. Tsegba told PolOff Yar'Adua does not want to take a stand against Etteh because he does not want to offend former President Obasanjo, who put Etteh in her position. Tsegba also said that until petitions before the electoral tribunal against Yar'Adua's own election as president are concluded and his power legitimized, he will continue to be reluctant to take such decisive action.

¶15. (C) COMMENT: The opposition to Etteh remains hopeful that she will step aside soon and allow the House to return to business (FYI: such basic functions as the introduction of the budget have been delayed. End FYI.) However, both sides have vowed to stand their ground, and if Etteh intends to preside on Tuesday as if nothing is wrong or to appoint her own pro-tempore replacement, the likely result will be additional chaos and a House that remains paralyzed. Yar'Adua's restraint in becoming involved, whether motivated by uncertainty over his own position or by a genuine commitment to the separation of powers, has allowed this

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situation to drag on. Under the previous regime, former President Obasanjo routinely bullied the legislature into doing his bidding. Without this heavy-handed direction from above, many House members are just learning how to act on their own. END COMMENT.

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